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**Editor**

Hannah Froggart

[bjm@markallengroup.com](mailto:bjm@markallengroup.com)**Associate Publisher**

James Demery

[james.demery@markallengroup.com](mailto:james.demery@markallengroup.com)**Group Classified Manager**

Lauren York

[lauren.york@markallengroup.com](mailto:lauren.york@markallengroup.com)**Circulation Director**

Sally Boettcher

[sally.boettcher@markallengroup.com](mailto:sally.boettcher@markallengroup.com)**Group Production Manager**

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The *British Journal of Midwifery* is published by MA Healthcare Ltd, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7738 5454  
Website: [www.britishtjournalofmidwifery.com](http://www.britishtjournalofmidwifery.com)

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ISSN 0969 – 4900

Printed by Pensord Press Ltd, Blackwood, NP12 2YA

Cover picture: ISTOCK



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# What the general election means for midwives

Prime Minister Theresa May surprised the country in April with the announcement of a snap general election, set to be held on 8 June 2017 (BBC, 2017).

A recent survey showed that 55% of citizens are concerned the UK will deteriorate in the coming years (House of Lords, 2017), and the NHS will be a key electoral issue.

Brexit is going to affect the NHS deeply, since we will lose health research funding from the EU, and the government will have to meet the shortfall as well as bolster notoriously underfunded health services. Earlier this year, the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) reported that the pay restraint for midwives employed by the NHS was going to continue into its seventh year in 2017, which John Skewes, RCM Director for Policy, Employee Relations and Communications, described as 'reckless in the extreme' and a 'disastrous policy' (Dabrowski, 2017a).

It is unclear how Brexit will affect the willingness and ability of health workers from other EU countries to seek employment with the NHS. Brexit is not yet in effect, but only 96 European nurses registered to work in the UK in December 2016 where 1 304 European nurses did so last July. Moreover, a recent survey indicated that 42% of current European NHS staff are thinking of leaving the UK—and more than 5 500 have already done so since the Brexit vote (All Party Parliamentary Health Group, 2017).

Most importantly, underfunding and staff shortages are going to gravely affect the quality of care that the NHS can provide, and therefore the health of its clients. Cathy Warwick, Chief Executive of the RCM, reported to the House of Lords Select Committee earlier this year: 'We now know from global research that if you are going to maintain the health and wellbeing of women and babies, they need midwifery input, and that is best delivered by midwives' (Dabrowski, 2017b).

Labour pledges to 'end the use of exploitative zero hours contracts, close the loopholes in the statutory minimum wage rates' (Corbyn, 2017), although mere promises might not be enough to unseat Theresa May.

May has shown no desire to meet the Leave campaign's notorious pledge of £350m for the NHS, and her government has not mentioned Brexit at all in the Department of Health's brief policy document, Mandate to NHS England. However, they have promised £100 m for A&E departments (Department of Health, 2017). **BJM**

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**Hannah Froggart**  
Editor